

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 228 117

SO 014 512

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TITLE Family Roles as Perceived by Japanese and German Adolescents.
PUB DATE Sep 82
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (San Francisco, CA, September 6-10, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Comparative Analysis; *Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Influences; Decision Making; *Family Environment; Fathers; Females; Males; Modernization; Mothers; Parent Participation; *Parent Role; Sex Role; *Social Attitudes; Social Science Research
IDENTIFIERS *Japan; *West Germany

ABSTRACT

The study deals with inter- and intracultural differences in the perception of family roles. One hundred and fifty-six Japanese students (40 modern females, 76 traditional females, and 40 males) and 148 German students (58 modern females, 49 traditional females, and 41 males) answered questionnaires concerning the ideal and real decision-making power of their parents and their sex-role preferences. Results show that modern values, attitudes, and behavior related to family roles need not necessarily occur in equally advanced industrially but culturally different societies. In spite of considerable similarity with respect to equal decision making for mothers and fathers in both cultures, the Japanese, as compared to the German fathers, exert more influence as perceived by their children. Japanese, as compared to German adolescents, advocate the traditional role differentiation more. However, intra-cultural (modern vs. traditional sub-groups) and gender effects have to be taken into account in each culture. Adolescents in both cultures report a closer relation to their mothers than to their fathers. (Author/RM)

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Family Roles As Perceived
By Japanese and German Adolescents

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Paper prepared for presentation at the annual meetings
of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco,
September 1982.

Abstract

The present study deals with the question of inter- and intracultural differences in the perception of family roles. Adolescents of two highly industrialized but culturally very different nations were compared: Japan and West Germany. In each culture, groups of more modern and more traditional adolescents were selected. The data are based on questionnaires from N = 156 male and female students from Japan and N = 148 male and female students from West Germany. The results showed significant inter- and intra-cultural differences in the perceived decision-making power in respect to several domains of life and the preferred role differentiation in the family. No cultural differences occurred in the kind of relation between adolescents and their parents. (a) In spite of considerable similarity in respect to equal decision making for mothers and fathers in both cultures, the Japanese as compared to the German fathers exert more influence as perceived by their children. (b) General attitudes of the adolescents indicate great inter-cultural differences: Japanese as compared to German adolescents advocate the traditional role differentiation more. However, intra-cultural (modern vs. traditional sub-groups) and gender effects have to be taken into account in each culture. (c) Adolescents in both cultures report a closer relation to their mothers than to their fathers. - The data are discussed from the point of view of different cultural values determining the nature of family roles.

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Family Roles As Perceived
By Japanese and German Adolescents¹

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One may conceive of family roles (in the conjugal family) as the dynamics of interrelations between mother, father and children, which are determined in part by decision making influence (who decides in general, or in specific domains of life), and sex role preferences.

However, it remains unclear from present studies on family role whether decision making and sex role preference are interchangeable variables, or whether they represent different aspects of family roles, which need not be the same in different cultures. The present study deals with the question whether--as theories of modernization postulate--democratic decision making in the family and "modern" sex role preferences necessarily develop by industrialization in a highly different cultures such as Japan.

For Germany, recent studies demonstrate a considerable decrease of traditional patriarchal values and an increasing tendency towards equality and partnership between man and woman, increasing participation of fathers in the socialization of children, and a rising tendency of mothers to choose a double role by returning to work, at the latest after their children

enter school—in short, a general tendency towards interchangeability of sex roles (cf. Bundesminister, 1976; Beck-Gernsheim, 1980; Nave-Herz, 1981).

In the Japanese traditional culture the traditional Confucian values of group solidarity ("ie") and obligation ("giri"), of loyalty and obedience to authority, and the patriarchal and paternalistic kinship structure, served as the moral code and pattern for social relations inside and outside the family (cf. Nakane, 1970; Hsu, 1975). Closely related to the traditional patriarchal values was the Buddhist and Confucian belief in the inferiority of women.

After Japan's surrender, the occupation gave women guarantees for equality which were in many aspects more progressive than in other democratic societies. This could have given the Japanese women the chance to acquire more equality in the family domain, to receive higher education and equal opportunities on the job market, to become economically and socially more independent and self-reliant.

However, recent studies demonstrate considerable inequality of men and women in higher education or on the job market, even more pronounced than in the West (Foreign Press Center, 1977, Trommsdorff, 1982). On the other hand, studies on the Japanese modern middle-class family describe the modern Japanese woman as exerting considerable influence in family and culture (Nakane, 1970; Linhart, 1976; Morsbach, 1977, Trommsdorff, 1979; Vogel, 1979). She is mainly responsible for the socialization of her children, to whom she has an especially close relation, and

her influence on budget decisions should be considerable since her husband hands over his salary to her.

In order to compare the family roles in Germany as a Western and in Japan as an Eastern culture as an effect of industrialization it may be useful to differentiate, beside inter-cultural comparisons, between more traditional and more modern subgroups in each culture, assuming that such intra-cultural variance partly determines the speed and quality of social change.

Method

Sample

In each culture, a group of more "modern" and more "traditional" female students was selected on account of educational background.

Altogether, 156 Japanese students (40 modern and 76 traditional females and 40 males) and 148 German students (58 modern and 49 traditional females, and 41 males) participated in the study.

Instruments

The students answered the questionnaires in their classes. The questionnaires had been translated into Japanese and back-translated by bilingual Japanese. The items of these questionnaires tapped:

- decision making power of parents (ideal and real);
- sex role preference.

Results and Discussion

Our data show that in both countries, joint decision making is preferred rather than either purely mothers' or fathers' last word in decisions. However, in Japan as compared to Germany, adolescents' preference for and perception of equality in decision making (ideal and real) of mother and father is less pronounced. Furthermore, the Japanese father is perceived as being more influential than the mother in most areas of decision making. Even in the assumedly most important areas of decision making--budget and socialization of the children--the Japanese father has more, and the mother less to say than their German counterparts.

These results support the assumption for a patriarchal family structure in Japan (cf. Koyama, 1962; Johnson, 1976), and underline its present stability from the point of view of adolescents, while the thesis of the powerful Japanese mother (cf. Nakane, 1970; Mae, 1981) is not supported.

Attitudes and perceptions concerning decision-making power in the family are embedded in general beliefs and attitudes on gender-role differentiation, as has been assumed by Scanzoni & Szinovacz (1980). Japanese as compared to German males are more expected to support the family, while women should rather stay at home; Japanese women may only work if no problems come up in their family. These results indicate a strong tendency of Japanese as compared to German adolescents to adhere to a patriarchal family structure and traditional sex-roles.

Though Japanese adolescents basically accept the traditional patriarchal family structure, with the father as legitimate authority who is responsible for the support of the family, essential inconsistencies with respect to the ideal image of decision-making occur: Equality between husband and wife is more valued than dominance of the father.

Our data clearly indicate inconsistencies between the value of equality on the one hand, and the preference for traditional sex role differentiation on the other hand. Obviously, these different indicators of family roles have a similar meaning in Germany but a different meaning in Japan. It should be interesting for future research to study the possible effects of such "inconsistencies" between "modern" and "traditional" attitudes related to family roles: Are these only inconsistencies from the point of view of Western theorizing? Or do such discrepancies really exist in Japan and affect social and value change with respect to the family domain?

Some of the inter-cultural differences can be better explained by looking at subgroups in each culture. Sex-specific intra-cultural comparisons demonstrate for several items that in Japan, male adolescents prefer the patriarchal family structure and related gender roles to a larger extent than females. If sex-specific differences in such perceptions and attitudes occur at all in Germany, males present themselves even as more "modern" than females.

Socialization-specific, intra-cultural comparisons partly support the assumption that differences in education may be

an indicator for different socialization and related values concerning family power and sex roles. "Modern" females--especially in Germany--prefer the double role of the working mother to a larger extent than "traditional" females; they also prefer equal power and responsibility of husband and wife more than the "traditional" group. In budget decisions, the "traditional" girls of both countries prefer mothers's dominance.

These intra-cultural differences clearly indicate the need to look for theoretically relevant subgroups when doing cross-cultural research in order to specify the conditions and correlates of the variables under study. Possibly, the sex-specific differences in perceived and valued family roles (more traditional preferences for males) may indicate that for Japan, changes in sex roles will be rather slow as long as males adhere to the patriarchal family system.

Conclusion

Our cross-cultural study on family rôles has shown that "modern" values, attitudes and behavior related to family roles need not necessarily occur in equally advanced but culturally different societies. "Modernization" may affect specific values but leave unchanged other beliefs and behavior related to family roles. Furthermore, our cross-cultural study supports the assumption that family role is a theoretical construct which should be studied with respect to its multiple components. We have seen that these components may not have the same meaning

and function in different cultures. This leads to question the theoretical and empirical relations between the components of family roles in further research.

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Table 1

"family roles" Decision-making power (percentage of responses)

Culture Gender Modern/ Traditional	JAPAN					FRG				
	females		total	males	total	females		total	males	total
	m	t				m	t			
<u>1. Budget</u>										
<u>Ideal</u>										
mother	2.5	22.4	15.5	7.5	13.5	3.8	20.4	11.9	5.0	9.7
father	7.5	11.8	10.3	20.0	12.8	0.0	2.0	1.0	0.0	0.7
both	90.0	65.8	74.1	72.5	73.7	96.2	77.6	87.1	95.0	89.6
<u>Real</u>										
mother	40.0	37.3	38.3	26.3	35.3	32.7	42.9	37.6	32.5	35.4
father	27.5	21.3	23.5	26.3	24.2	13.5	6.1	9.9	22.5	13.9
both	32.5	41.3	38.3	47.4	40.5	53.8	51.0	52.5	45.0	50.7
<u>2. Vacation</u>										
<u>Ideal</u>										
mother	2.5	3.9	3.4	5.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
father	7.5	6.6	6.9	12.5	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
both	90.0	89.5	89.7	82.5	87.8	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<u>Real</u>										
mother	17.9	20.3	19.5	7.5	16.3	18.0	10.2	14.1	10.3	12.8
father	38.5	23.0	28.3	37.5	30.7	22.0	12.2	17.2	33.3	21.3
both	43.6	56.8	52.2	55.0	52.9	60.0	77.6	68.7	56.4	66.0
<u>3. Sociali- zation</u>										
<u>Ideal</u>										
mother	0.0	1.3	0.9	5.0	1.9	0.0	2.1	1.0	2.5	1.4
father	0.0	7.9	5.2	7.5	5.8	1.9	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.7
both	100.0	90.8	94.0	87.5	92.3	98.1	97.9	98.0	97.5	97.9
<u>Real</u>										
mother	27.5	17.3	20.9	22.2	21.2	47.2	49.0	48.0	30.0	42.8
father	10.0	26.7	20.9	30.6	23.2	9.4	6.1	7.8	15.0	9.7
both	62.5	56.0	58.3	47.2	55.6	43.4	44.9	44.1	55.0	47.6

Table 2

Attitudes to sex-role differentiation and decision-making power

Culture Gender Modern/Traditional	<u>JAPAN</u>					<u>FRG</u>				
	females		total	males		females		total	males	
	m	t		m	t	m	t		m	t
<u>Sex-role differentiation</u> ¹										
1. Men should support the family	3.03	3.39	3.27	3.38	3.30	1.66	2.37	2.00	1.95	1.98
2. Politics is the domain of men	2.00	2.25	2.16	2.51	2.25	1.28	2.06	1.66	1.48	1.61
3. Men and women should be socialized differently	1.93	2.37	2.22	2.72	2.34	1.47	1.82	1.64	1.53	1.61
<u>Decision-making power</u> ¹										
4. Men should have the last word	2.78	3.41	3.19	3.51	3.27	1.28	1.80	1.53	1.50	1.52
5. Women should give in	1.67	2.25	2.05	2.82	2.25	1.30	1.37	1.33	1.48	1.38
<u>Sex-Role (composite score)</u> 1,2	2.14	2.68	2.49	3.02	2.63	1.35	1.66	1.50	1.50	1.50

¹5-point-scale: 1 = disagree completely ... 5 = agree completely.

²Mean of items 1 to 5.

Significant t values

Note: t-tests for independent samples

1) Differences between Cultures

	total sample	females	males	modern females	traditional females
Role differentiation					
1. Men should support family	9.78 ^{***}	7.76 ^{***}	5.93 ^{***}	5.48 ^{***}	4.80 ^{***}
2. Politics is domain of men	5.47 ^{***}	3.60 ^{***}	4.85 ^{***}	4.20 ^{***}	-
3. Men and women should be socialized differently	5.86 ^{***}	4.06 ^{***}	4.48 ^{***}	2.23 [*]	2.73 ^{**}
Decision-making power					
4. Men should have last word	13.64 ^{***}	10.57 ^{***}	9.02 ^{***}	6.38 ^{***}	7.39 ^{***}
5. Women should give in	8.16 ^{***}	5.11 ^{***}	6.38 ^{***}	2.48 [*]	5.37 ^{***}
Sex role (composite score)	11.92 ^{***}	9.43 ^{***}	7.64 ^{***}	5.05 ^{***}	7.13 ^{***}

2) Differences within Cultures

	FRG females vs. males	Japan females vs. males	FRG females modern vs. traditional	Japan females modern vs. trad- ition
Role differentiations				
1. Men should support family	-	-	-3.14 ^{**}	-
2. Politics is domain of men	-	-	-4.00 ^{***}	-
3. Men and women should be socialized differently	-	-2.30 ^{**}	-	-2.07 [*]
Decision-making power				
4. Men should have last word	-	-	-2.51 ^{***}	-2.66 ^{***}
5. Women should give in	-	-4.03 ^{***}	-	-3.34 ^{***}
Sex role (composite score)	-	-3.28 ^{***}	-2.28	-3.43 ^{***}

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Table 3

-13-

"family roles"

Attitudes to working wives (percentage of responses)

Culture Gender Modern/Traditional	JAPAN					FRG				
	females		total	males	total	females		total	males	total
	m	t				m	t			
Who should support the family ¹⁾										
men (yes)	37.5	47.4	44.0	67.5	50.0	13.0	22.4	17.5	7.7	17.5
both (yes)	62.5	50.0	54.3	32.5	48.7	87.0	77.6	82.5	92.3	82.5
Women should stay home										
yes	2.5	7.9	6.0	12.5	6.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
no	97.5	92.1	94.0	87.5	94.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Women should only work in case of no children										
yes	10.0	7.9	8.6	7.5	8.6	18.9	49.0	33.3	10.0	33.3
no	90.0	92.1	91.4	92.5	91.4	81.1	51.0	66.7	90.0	66.7
..if husband and children are taken care of										
yes	72.5	69.7	70.7	62.5	70.7	26.4	32.7	29.4	27.5	29.4
no	27.5	30.3	29.3	37.5	29.3	73.6	67.3	70.6	72.5	70.6
..even if problems come up										
yes	12.5	9.2	10.3	5.0	10.3	45.3	4.1	25.5	47.5	25.5
no	87.5	90.8	89.7	95.0	89.7	54.7	95.9	74.5	52.5	74.5

¹ The responses add up to 100% when the category "women" is included.

Table 3 contin.

Significant chi²

"family roles" -14-

1) Differences between Cultures: Japan vs. FRG

yes vs. no	total sample	females	males	modern females	traditional females
men support	40.89 ***	16.53 ***	27.50 ***	6.41 ***	6.86 **
both support	43.53 ***	18.56 ***	27.50 ***	6.41 ***	8.37 **
should stay home	9.69 **	4.57 *	-	-	-
no children	16.84 ***	19.07 ***	-	-	25.36 ***
only if taken care of	47.27 ***	35.39 ***	8.54 **	17.67 ***	15.10 ***
even if problems come up	29.96 ***	7.63 **	16.53 ***	9.94 **	-

2) Differences within Cultures:

yes vs. no	FRG females vs. males	Japan females vs. males	FRG females modern vs. traditional	Japan females modern vs. traditional
men support	-	5.68 *	-	-
both support	-	4.82 *	-	-
should stay home	-	-	-	-
no children	6.84 **	-	9.08 **	-
only if taken care of	-	-	-	-
even if problems come up	5.45 *	-	20.64 ***	-

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Table 4
Relation to Parents

	<u>JAPAN</u>		<u>FRG</u>	
	total	<u>t</u>	total	<u>t</u>
Relation to				
mother ¹	10.28		9.88	
father ¹	11.91		11.21	
difference	1.63	8.66*	1.33	6.07*

*p < .001.

¹Sum of 3 items, each measured on five-point-scales: 1 = very good ...

5 = very bad.

Footnote

¹Portions of this study have been presented at the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, September 1982. This study would not have been possible without the generous help and cooperation of Professor Koyano and Professor Ibaraki. Professor Ibaraki translated the German questionnaires and adapted them for the Japanese sample; he also collected the data from Tokyo Kasei University. Professor Koyano organized the collection of data from Tokyo Meiji Gakuin University. I am grateful to both colleagues who gave considerable advice in the preparation of the study, to Dipl. Soz. Ulrike Menard-Holzhauser who was responsible for the data collection of the "traditional" female group in Germany, and to Wolfgang Woerner for carefully reading the manuscript. Requests for reprints should be sent to the author's address: Professor Dr. G. Trommsdorff, Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft, RWTH Aachen, Eilfschornsteinstraße 7, D - 5100 Aachen, West Germany.